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ABSTRACT

Libraries must be aware of the needs of the users in their funding organization, and yet, there is growing concern among library funding organizations that libraries are not fully coping with the information explosion. In fact, libraries, by not adopting new techniques to become more productive, are actually helping to cause the problems of the information explosion, rather than utilizing all the new information available to benefit the needs of their funding organization. Because of the information explosion the user of information today has to cull through so much more available data than in the past. The emphasis must shift, therefore, to giving the user the most pertinent facts, to select the information he needs from the enormous amount available. The libraries that seem to be growing and having less trouble getting funded are those which look upon their role as an information center. FIND, a question-answering service providing information on demand, an associate company of SVP in Paris, can enable libraries to become true information centers. (Author/SJ)

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ARE LIBRARIES CAUSING OR UTILIZING THE INFORMATION EXPLOSION?

Remarks to the New York Chapter of the Special Libraries Association
February 7, 1973
Haines B. Gaffner, President, FIND

The subject area for this speech was primarily to discuss FIND--our unique question-answering service providing Information on Demand. However this SLA audience offers me a rare opportunity to share with you some insights we at FIND have obtained concerning libraries.

We deal directly with many executives in helping to solve their informational needs. They have disclosed much to us about their attitudes and current feelings about libraries. Thus from FIND's particular perspective of the library community, I'd like to pass on the essence of what we've heard.

We are out of the golden sixties...when money was available for most everything...and into the budget-minded seventies. Libraries more than ever must be aware of the needs of the users in their funding organization. With the recession gradually receding into history, many libraries are awaking now to the reality that their budgets are remaining cut, and in some cases even being further slashed. This is true from the Federal Government, which just cut $90 million from library funding, to state and local levels, to Universities, and to companies.

Could one of the reasons be that there is growing concern among library funding organizations that libraries are not fully coping with the information explosion? In fact that libraries, by not adopting new techniques to become more productive, are actually helping to cause the problems of the information explosion, rather than utilizing all the new information available to benefit the needs of their funding organization?

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What good are those rows of books and stacks of magazines and fancy microfilm reader-printers if users can't get their questions answered?

Because of the information explosion the user of information today has to cull through so much more available data than in the past. Many users have that awesome feeling: "My answer must be out there somewhere... but how can I get at it?" The past solution was to do a "takeout"...to provide the user with all the relevant available information...to give a stack of articles to answer his question. The emphasis must now switch to giving him the most pertinent facts from those articles...to SELECT the information the user needs from the great hordes and mounds available. Users of information have very little experience retrieving information--they did not learn research well in school, nor how to effectively use a Research Librarian.

In fact, in order to survive and prosper today, librarians must accomplish two very non-traditional tasks. These tasks are the heart and soul of FIND's business, and make us very much an ally working together with the library community. First, we both must SELL management in all organizations...in fact all library users...on the value of information. Information is NOT free, but is as valuable an asset in running an organization as money, personnel, or factories. Second, we both must TEACH management how to use information, when and how to ask questions, how to extract value out of their library operation.

When a subscriber is SOLD FIND...and one out of three sales presentations today is bringing a sale...he is buying quick, accurate answers to questions. Once sold, we roll out an intensive teaching program aimed at getting potential users in that organization to phone

FIND when they have questions too time-consuming to be answered internally. Our sales and teaching program might be adopted, with certain modifications, by the library community. We'd be happy to assist if called upon. Because the more libraries and FIND can convince funding organizations of the VALUE OF INFORMATION...that it's NOT FREE...the more we will all prosper.

The libraries that seem to be growing and having less trouble getting funded are those which look upon their role as an information center. By solving on a day-to-day basis the informational needs of their funding organization...rather than providing a place for users to come and browse or borrow a magazine...they are proving themselves to be a cost effective expense area. They are directly contributing to the overall productivity of their organization. And there's no doubt that white-collar productivity is the name of the game for the seventies.

When your users have an information problem they have a question. If you can utilize your library's budgeted resources to answer that question, and dozens more for all levels of users in your organization, you'll be remembered when budget time comes around. Let's face it. A Dun & Bradstreet directory sitting on your shelf is not information. When an answer is extracted from the directory, <u>that</u> is information. The resources you have at hand should be based on the number of questions they can answer in a day or week or year for your funding organization. You will then be viewed not as an overhead expense, but as a direct contributor to efficiency and profitability.

The libraries that will most easily survive and prosper in these times of rapid change are those with over 50% of their activities as an information center. There no longer need be confusion in defining the

differences between a library and an information center. In a recent survey I conducted for the Information Industry Association among leaders in the library/information field, the following definitions, all similar, seemed well established:

...information centers do something with collected information, while libraries only collect it...

...information centers are dynamic, libraries are static...

...information centers are analytical, libraries are archival...

...information centers are 2nd generation libraries...

...information centers are tomorrow's publishers, gathering and disseminating information to their funding organization, and sometimes beyond, to bring a greater return on investment...

Information centers harness the information explosion for the benefit of their users. Libraries collect, catalog and stack the ever-mounting spillover from the information explosion, and in the process run the danger of confounding and befuddling their users. By accumulating "information overload", as Toffler so aptly described the phenomena in Future Shock, libraries might be helping to cause the problems of the information explosion.

In the 70s libraries must, be more concious of helping their funding organizations benefits from the information explosion, not be its victim.

The rapid market acceptance to the FIND service indicates the willingness for budgets to be spent where answers to specific questions can be delivered rapidly and accurately. Publishers Weekly in their article of October 16, 1972, defined FIND well: "FIND is an all-purpose question-answering service sold on a subscription basis primarily to businesses and other organizations. A person within the subscribing organization simply telephones the FIND offices at 3 E. 48th St. in Manhattan and gives his question to a specially trained researcher. The key to the entire service is FIND's ability to get answers faster and more economically than the subscriber's own staff."

Here are a few quick internal statistics on FIND's operation. There are now about 160 subscribers asking on an average 8 questions per month. 45% of these are simple, 45% medium and 10% complex. Over 60% of questions are answered within 24 hours, none are scheduled for longer than 5 days. Actual process time per question is about 40 minutes; average value is about $10.00 per question. 7% of questions are literature searches which take an average process time of 96.4 minutes.

Comparative volume of our associate company in Paris - SVP - shows the potential for the Information On Demand concept. FIND now handles about 1200 questions per month. SVP answers 4,000 questions per day, for over 12,000 subscribers. The

phone number of their 300-person information center - SVP-11-11 - is the third largest phone number used in France after calling for the time and the weather. Thus FIND has a long way to go.

Yet already in the USA FIND is being used by such large companies as Philip Morris, International Paper, Hitachi, Chase Manhattan Bank, GTE, Playboy, Magnavox, Coca-Cola, Bankers Trust, Carl Ally, United Jewish Appeal, American Express, Fawcett, Singer, Ralston Purina, Bristol Myers, RCA, Harcourt Brace ... plus dozens of small firms, organizations and associations. Usage is much broader by companies that do not have their own libraries, or whose libraries are archival, such as American Express, Magnavox, or Bristol Myers. But a growing number of librarians are also finding FIND helps them serve their funding organization in a more cost effective manner. FIND is helping them be more productive by:

1. enabling them to spend their budgeted funds on the specialized needs of their organization, and use FIND for obtaining answers in tangential areas; one library subscriber's question was recently answered from the Yellow Pages of 48 cities -- we stack and use them often -- but that library could not afford to stack them for occassional use.

2. using FIND to gather competitive information available to the general public, but not, easily obtained by that specific subscriber.

3. using FIND when there are heavy demands on their own library staff, thus saving money by not having to staff for peak loads. This means fewer missed deadlines, less overtime, and a higher level of satisfaction among all users in an organization, not just those who are higher level or scream the loudest.

4. using FIND's team of roving researchers (about 25% of our research staff) to obtain answers and copies and do research in dozens of external libraries around Greater New York City, preserving the time and wear and tear of their own staff.

5. using FIND to get answers best obtained from non-print media. FIND maintains a Source Index of over 5,000 sources where it can phone to get current information from a specialized center or office or association that stays current on that subject.

It is in the area of non-print media where FIND actually enters the arena of "new media publishing." Much of the information explosion remains locked in the heads of specialized experts who can really only be tapped by personal telephone conversations. In today's fast-changing world much information is often "old" by the time it gets into print. Fully 60% of FIND's answers come in audio form from such experts, and is relayed in audio form by telephone to subscribers. Librarians using FIND suddenly have a vast new resource available to them for answering the questions of their funding organization.

Furthermore, through cost studies, we have found that in many cases it is cheaper to get the answer on the phone than to store it in-house. When a question comes in where we try to utilize in-house information, we still must retrieve it, check to assure it is still current, then refile it. This time cost plus the original cost of acquisition of the information plus storage cost really adds up. A recent analysis we did of several hundred questions revealed that a phone answer cost $5.50 on average, while an answer utilizing in-house data cost $11.02. This difference over thousands of questions in a year can make a sizable impact on our budget.

Beyond the 60% of answers coming from non-print media, the sources for the other 40% breaks down into: 10% from the SVP worldwide network; 15% from external libraries and 15% from our in-house collection.

Librarians by necessity have had to concentrate their talents in the handling of the printed word. After all, that's where most of the answers still are today. Publishers Weekly described the shifting situation well: "FIND is one of the

first commercial tests of a basic concept that many believe will underlie a large part of communications development in the future. This is the idea of user-initiated demand, or return-response, as opposed to traditional publishing in which the information packager takes the initiative in putting material in front of potential buyers. Compared to publications, user-initiated demand is in its infancy. Yet its growth could change the shape of many published products."

It only makes sense for librarians today to concentrate their efforts on collecting and using what traditional publishers are providing them. But it might prove beneficial to explore using through Information On Demand.

FIND can prove valuable in converting your library activities more and more into those of an information center. If today your library is primarily archival, a FIND subscription will also give you a question-answering capability. If you are already primarily an information center, FIND becomes a very complementary service. You can invest a greater portion of available funds in the area of specialization of your organization. This means you can answer a greater number of questions for them from your internal resources. And you can use FIND to handle the peripheral, non-specialized and non-print information areas. After all, with the information explosion, no one library can store everything. But with FIND available, you can take full advantage of the information explosion.

And with your management getting an ever-increasing number of its questions answered, you will stand a better chance of being well funded in the budget-minded and productivity conscious era of the 70s.